

Russian Gulch State Park



Our Mission

The mission of the California Department of Parks and Recreation is to provide for the health, inspiration and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.

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Russian Gulch State Park

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*Roaring sea caves,
a pygmy forest found
nowhere else on earth,
ocean views from
Victorian windows—
welcome to
Mendocino area
state parks.*

On the Mendocino coast, the air has a distinct fragrance of salt, and the crashing waves create a continuous resonance. The tall bluffs at this spot north of San Francisco resemble the rugged shores of the east coast, but with an unmistakable California flair. Victorian-era communities that overlook the sea reflect the New England roots of their builders who, in the ordinary course of life, added volumes to California's colorful history.

MENDOCINO AREA STATE PARKS

Two miles north of Mendocino, Russian Gulch State Park's collapsed sea cave cuts 200 feet into the headlands to form the boiling surge known as the Devil's Punchbowl. Mendocino is embraced on three sides by unmatched views of Mendocino Headlands State Park. Van Damme State Park, beginning at the mouth of the Little River, has a protected cove for divers, a fern canyon for hikers, and a unique forest of Mendocino pygmy cypress.

The climate here is temperate year-round. Winter rains and cool summer fogs



Russian Gulch Creek

that usually burn off by mid-morning provide the moisture necessary for the thriving coastal redwoods. Prepare for changeable weather by dressing in light layers.

MENDOCINO HISTORY

Native Americans

The Pomo date back about 3,000 years on the North Coast. Their main village of redwood bark houses was located at the mouth of the Big River. It is believed that when Russian and Aleutian fur trappers arrived here in the early 1800s, it was the Pomo's first contact with non-natives. The Pomo passed through on annual food gathering visits, but eventually settled year-round. They hunted large and small game, caught fish and shellfish, and gathered seaweed, acorns and various seeds. Whatever they could not obtain

locally they acquired in trade with other groups; in times of plenty the groups often gathered to share the bounty.

When the Pomo were drawn into the mission system in the early 1800s, their way of life was forever altered. Within a generation or two, direct conflict and exposure to European diseases nearly decimated them. Today about 5,000 Pomo descendants, who still occupy parts of their ancestral lands, gather the raw materials to make some of the world's finest Native American baskets and to pass on this ancient skill to the next generation of artisans.

European and American Settlers

Settled by emigrants from all over the world, this area has a long history of entrepreneurial exploitation. In 1812 a ship owned by the Russian-American Company entered a cove beneath the bluffs of what would become North America's southernmost Russian settlement, Fort Ross. In the 1830s the American and Hudson's Bay trappers passed through seeking beaver pelts. The Russian colony was a commercial failure, and in 1841 they sold out and left. The Fort Ross property had various owners, including John Sutter, and in 1906 the fort and some acreage were acquired by the State for restoration, reconstruction and interpretation of this era.



Francisco. However, heavy logging diminished the local timber resources, and by 1893 the Little River Mill closed down. With the loss of the mill, businesses, services, and even the school were abandoned.

In the Russian Gulch area, the lumber trade consisted of several small mills that only operated for a short time. The area eventually became “logged over,” but the pier was used for passengers and freight into the next century.

RUSSIAN GULCH STATE PARK

The park's most famous feature was created when pounding waves forged an

inland tunnel, leaving a hole 100 feet across and 60 feet deep. At high tide the boiling waves crash around the cave's interior, producing a reverberant echo. The photogenic Fredrick W. Panhorst Bridge rises gracefully 100 feet from the bottom of the gulch. The park has nearly one-and-a-half miles of ocean frontage, and its craggy beauty rivals any point along California's coast. In the

spring its foggy headlands come alive with acres of wildflowers.

Park History

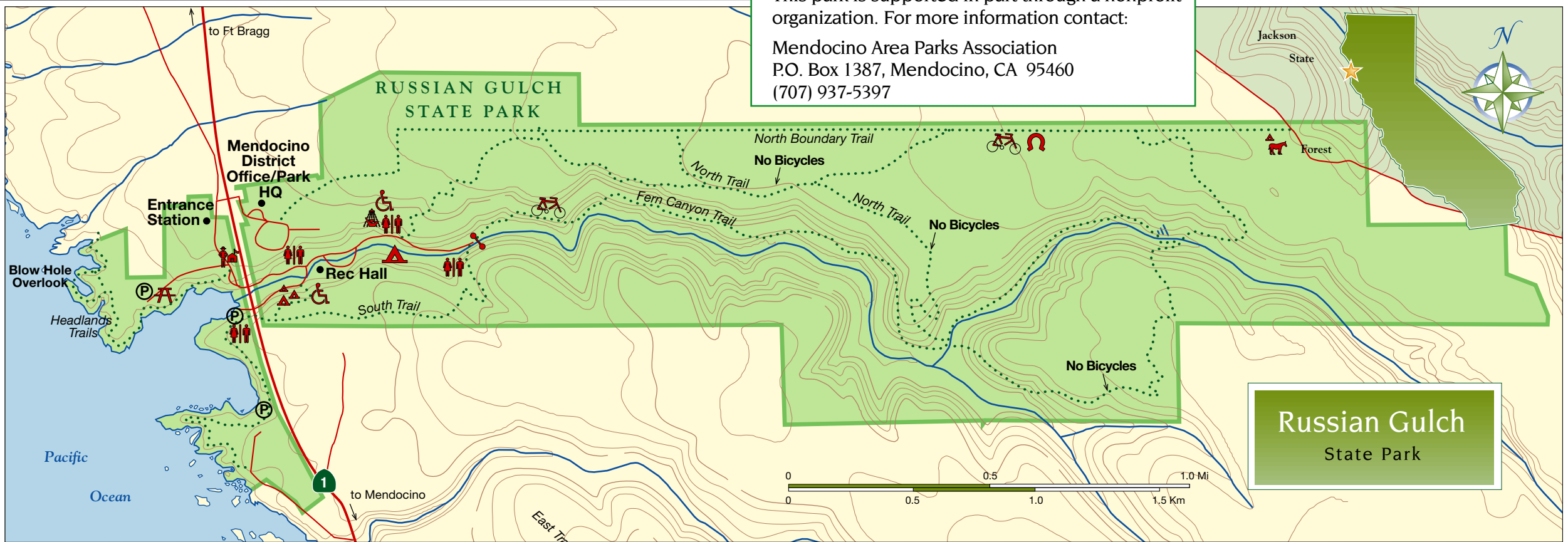
The lumber operations around Russian Gulch were modest compared to the Big River mill. Once redwood resources ran out in the 1860s, most of the lumber shipped from here consisted of railroad ties, shingles and other split lumber. In the early 1880s, several homestead claims were filed on the land, and some of it was farmed. Until well into the 1900s, Russian Gulch was a fishing boat harbor and a stop for freight and passenger ships. In the mid-1920s, Russian Gulch was recognized as a good place to visit during hot summers, when F. O. Warner, a Los Angeles real estate developer, purchased land around Russian Gulch to turn into a resort. In August 1928 the *Mendocino Beacon* reported that the Native Sons of the Golden West had launched a movement “to have Russian Gulch...set aside for one of the proposed State Parks.” In 1933 the State acquired the land, and on October 21, 1934, Russian Gulch State Park was dedicated.

The source of the name Russian Gulch is uncertain. It is possible that cartographers charting the area named it for its proximity to Fort Ross; another local tradition suggests it was named after a deserter from the fort who settled in the area.

The Lumber Mills

In 1850 the *Frolic* sank off Point Cabrillo with its San Francisco-bound cargo. Salvagers were unsuccessful, but their disappointment was appeased by the nearby stands of redwoods. Within two years they had built a sawmill at the mouth of the Big River.

In 1864 Little River was founded as a mill town to supply lumber to build San



Legend

	Paved road		Locked Gate
	Trail		Parking
	Accessible Feature		Picnic Area
	Bicycle Trail		Ranger Station
	Campground		Restrooms
	Group Campground		Showers
	Horse Campground		Waterfall
	Horse Trail		

PLEASE REMEMBER

- The water is bitterly cold, swift and unforgiving. Even on calm days, waves can overcome people standing at the water's edge or on rocks, and carry them out to sea.
- All features of the parks are protected by state law and may not be disturbed or collected.
- Anglers over the age of 16 must have a valid fishing license in their possession.
- Do not gather firewood or bring your own—most campgrounds have firewood for sale.
- Pets are welcome at most state parks, but must be kept on a leash no longer than six feet. In campgrounds they must be kept in a vehicle or in your tent at night.
- Driving off designated roads is not permitted
- State law requires that all bicycle riders under the age of 18 wear bicycle helmets.